

## **Images of Violence and Politics of Empathy: Case of the Rohingya Women**

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### **0.0 Introduction**

It is well acknowledged that digital technologies of images and overwhelming presence of social media are changing the conditions of production, distribution, circulation, remediation, consumption and reception of communication. Advancements in internet technologies and new forms of equipment have extended access to the World Wide Web (although not in all parts of the world), and billions of images of different type, genre (and partly unclear) origin are available to a virtually global audience '24/7'. In everyday life, Nicholas Mirzoeff writes, seeing has become the dominant mode of postmodern cultures with 'the visual as a place where meanings are created and contested' (Mirzoeff 1999:6).

As a consequence of these trends, scholars from different disciplines have been interested in understanding the ambivalences and contingencies, and the normative and ethical questions that are related to communication in general as well as to images in particular. In a time of global digital media, social networks and a mass production of images by all types of actors, images themselves are considered a weapon of war. One commonly ascribes images' specific qualities that words lack such as immediacy and authenticity. They possess mimetic qualities and have a visual circulability, i.e. the 'capacity to transgress linguistic boundaries – those visuals can be "read" by all' (Hansen 2011, 57). However, social scientists have to focus on the construction of the meaning of images, the political use and misuse of images and the surrounding discourses. Equally important to what is shown is that which is not shown, which is not seen, which is excluded from a visual representation. Thus, tremendous political power resides in deciding on the visibility or invisibility of someone or something.

This paper examines how significant social media sources such as Facebook have become in distributing information and images of violence with particular focus on women; and how the effects of social sharing and communal coping enhances the construction of an emotional sphere. In the case of influx of the Rohingya refugees from Myanmar to Bangladesh in August-September 2017,

circulation of images and videos through Facebook triggered public emotion of the citizens of Bangladesh and drew attention of the international community. At the same time, how the real struggles women disappeared from these social sites after their settlement in Bangladesh, and why the daily struggles and agency remained unnoticed in the social media.

### **1.0 Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh: Context and Background**

Bangladesh, the most densely-populated country in the world, is also known as the fourth largest Muslim-populated country, where both patriarchy and Islam prevail as the dominant sources of defining gender relations in the society. Strict gender segregation as well as conventional social norms tied up with religious ideologies and patriarchal values define women's subjugated role as well as entrust men with the power to control women and responsibility to protect them. As such, the status of women, in general, remains to be one of the major concerns for the policy-makers. According to the 2011 Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey, 87% of Bangladeshi women and girls experience sexual and gender-based violence in their lifetime. According to the 2015 Human Development Report, Bangladesh is ranked 142 out of 188 on the Gender Inequality Index.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the situation of women is even worse among the marginal groups that include religious and ethnic minorities as well as the refugees.

The Rohingya are one of Myanmar's many ethnic minorities mostly living in the Rakhine state. As they are Muslims and their ethnic features resembles the Bangladeshis, Myanmar's government denies them citizenship and sees them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, which is also a common attitude among many Burmese. As a part of a campaign of oppression Myanmar government started a military crackdown on insurgents in the western Rakhine state and burned the Rohingya villages, tortured and killed men and children, even babies, raped women --which the United Nation has called a 'textbook example of ethnic cleansing'. On August 25, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army attacked again, targeting police posts and an army base. Security forces cracked down on the wider population, and rights groups accused them of killing, raping, burning villages and shooting civilians from helicopters. A report published in New York Times says at least 6,700 Rohingya people, including 730 children, were killed by the Myanmar military and others in response to the attacks on police posts

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GII> accessed 12 January, 2019

by Rohingya insurgents in Rakhine State in August 2017. The exodus into Bangladesh began Since 25 August 2017, around 700,000 Rohingya refugees have fled Myanmar and taken shelter in different refugee camps in Ukhiya and Teknaf of Cox's Bazar district in Bangladesh. Before 25 August 2017, a total of 200,000 of the Rohingya have been already living in Cox's Bazar for years. As a result, Bangladesh is now hosting at least one million Rohingya refugees in various refugee camps in Cox's Bazar district in the existing camps and settlement extensions that have been established to accommodate the newly arrived refugees. A huge number of settlements have also been built by the refugees themselves with or without support of the locals and the authorities in the extended and adjacent forests of Kutupalong and Balukhali, two main settlement locations in Cox's Bazar. The other camps are located in Jamtoli, Bagghona, Potibunia, Leda, Nayapara, Unchiprang and other areas. Many of the refugees also left Cox's bazaar in search of job and some others had taken shelter in the local households in Cox's Bazar Sadar, Ramu, Teknaf and Ukhiya.

Once the Rohingya arrived in Bangladesh, the refugees faced an uncertain future too as Bangladesh government did not want to keep them. Rejected by the country they call home and unwanted by its hosts, the Rohingya have become one of the wretched communities on earth - impoverished, virtually stateless and have horrifying stories both from back home and of miseries in their destination. In this backdrop, citizens of Bangladesh stepped up. Thousands of images that depict the atrocities and range of cruelties have been circulated, shared and reproduced again and again in social media, especially in Facebook. Such photographs are taken by the international news media, national and local news media, and most importantly by ordinary Bangladeshi citizen. This has resulted in a huge outpouring of support from Bangladeshis living within and outside the countries, — people from all over coming together and pulling together donations to drive down in trucks to where the refugees are living. As the Rohingya crisis starts to get more coverage in the media, UN and international organizations also began their interventions along with local public supports. Finally, Bangladesh government decided to accept the refugees and provide necessary supports. Time, BBC, Al-Jazeera and some other news agencies have published series of photo-stories portraying these atrocities.

## 1.1 Aims

This paper aims to analyze how visual representations of suffering/violence/victimization of the Rohingya ethnic group of Myanmar in social media that had drawn enormous public sentiment/empathy that generated unprecedented social sharing and collective supports and how women symbols to depict the plight and how they gradually disappeared from the social media as soon as they got engaged in their daily struggle. In doing so, I intend to: identify specific patterns in the visual images of violence that connote characteristic meanings and convey frequent visual frames drawing public sentiment;

- explore women's condition and sufferings in the camps
- analyze specific differences and interactions between social and professional media in their use of visual representations of conflict;
- contextualize the use of visual frames in the social media against the respective intensification of the empathy and target audiences – including representations and perceptions in the media, to measure their relevance within wider media discourse.

## 1.2 Theoretical Consideration

There has been a good amount of research done on the issues of photographed violence and effects. In her book *Civil Imagination*, Azoulay developed the notion that ‘photography is an event’ (2012 : 26). Focusing instead on “the new relations that emerge between people through the mediation of photography,” she develops a “political ontology of the many, operating in public, in motion,” an ontology that approaches photography in terms of “a certain form of human being-with-others in which the camera or the photograph are implicated” (2012: 13, 18). This sense of plurality and the potential boundlessness of action are indebted to Arendt, but Azoulay recognizes that among the “many” are diverse kinds of actors and actants. Leshu Torchin (2012), on the other hand, provides us with a complex analysis of how witnessing publics are created and mobilized through visual technologies typically associated with mass media and popular culture. In her book *Creating the Witness* (ibid), Torchin investigates and discusses the communicative effectiveness, documentary power and socio-ethical usefulness of various operative tools, practices and visual media technologies (e.g. pictures, posters, reports, film, video, Internet) in producing virtual witnesses of human rights

violations and crimes against civilization, humanity and peace. She analyses how the encounter with visual testimony hails audiences, encouraging them to take both responsibility and action. Bearing witness is an ethical and transformative process, and each testimony of trauma and injustice has a great political value. These two approaches in general will play a major role in my essay and I will mainly be discussing the images (circulated in Facebook) in relation to these theories. To some extent, I will also be using Mirzoeff's 'countervisuality' approach in discussing the photographs I have picked. In discussing community feeling, public sentiment and collective action, I would draw upon Azoulay, Torchin and Sontag.

I have primarily used the photographs that have been widely circulated and shared in social media, and made headlines in other news media. I have chosen these images on the extent of sharing among Bangladeshi Facebook users in first months- from August to December, 2017. In addition to those, I would also attempt to look at the public response and initiatives shared on Facebook such as 'appeal' made for donation and charity for the Rohingya. Altogether 10 images have been taken into consideration.

Later, I relied on organization reports, newspaper and my personal visits to illustrate the condition of the Rohingya women.

## **2.0 Images of Rohingya Plight: Portrayal of Women**

Hundreds of heartrending photos have emerged and shared online as the mass exodus of the Rohingyas started since August 2017. The images produced by international professional agencies like AFP, AP as well as by ordinary public and the victims themselves contain certain themes –routes of exodus from Myanmar through enormous distress, death and brutal violence encountered by the Rohingya people, terrible predicaments in their life in refugee camps and critique to the role of states including Myanmar, India, Bangladesh but particularly targeted towards Aung San Suu Kyi, the national leader of Myanmar. In this section, in order to identify specific patterns and the strength of messages, some images are analyzed that have been widely circulated through social media.

## 2.1 The Escape, Walk and Float

Most of the refugees fled from Myanmar in overcrowded boats or improvised rafts across the Naf river that separates the country from Bangladesh. A number of these refugee-carrying boats capsized while some of the passengers could finally reach the shore. Possibly most of the circulated images depicted the plight of their exodus and distress of the journey.



Image 1

Image 1 is one of the most disseminated photos since 2015 while a number of Rohingyas started to leave Myanmar following the atrocities there in June 2015. This photograph has been repetitively used in news reports in major news papers, editorials and columns as well as social media iconizing the distress of the community and their dreadful chase for a place to survive. However, it is difficult to assume which particular event has been depicted in this photo. Some news channel published the image in 2012 when the first phase of ‘cleansing operation’ began in

June 2012<sup>2</sup>. However, the image became almost iconic in 2015, referring to the migrants in boats who had been rescued off the coasts of Indonesia and Malaysia a day after some 600 others were dropped off Indonesia’s Aceh province<sup>3</sup>. At that time, government of Bangladesh refused to accept Rohingya refugees that finally pushed thousands of Rohingyas floating in the sea. However, once

<sup>2</sup> <https://muslimvillage.com/2012/08/14/26882/turning-a-blind-eye-to-the-massacre-of-burmese-muslims/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.iran-daily.com/News/117803.html>



again in 2017, this image became one of the most-publicized frames as a number of boats packed with Rohingya refugees fleeing Myanmar's Rakhine state sank in the Naf river and the stream of Rohingya refugees began to enter Bangladesh. The image contains some Rohingya women and children sitting on a boat, moist in the rain, while the man in front with folded hands and tears in his eyes, became the defining icon of plights of the Rohingyas, appeal to the international community to their stateless and floating situation. This image has been copied more than thousand times, both in social and other news media without any reference to the photographer, only in some news reports and columns it is mentioned that the photo was taken by AFP.



Image 2

Image 2 depicting the arrival of an old woman on shore being dragged by a middle-aged man, both of them were all wet, was taken from the cover story of *Time* (October 2, 2017). This image along with the logo of *Time* has been shared by numerous Facebook members as that endorses their point. Hundreds of similar photographs are available online where the refugees are seen on the boat floating in the sea

These images that are being circulated since 2015 when fleeing Rohingyas were refused and pushed back by all neighboring states they were seeking refuge at -Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand.

In 2017, either because of Bangladesh's silent approval or the irresistible torrent of Rohingyas, allowed thousands of Rohingyas to enter inside Bangladesh. Therefore, the images of this span mostly illustrate, instead of floating, their arrival at Bangladesh but the distress of the painstaking journey. The

escape route included both land and waterways, and there are remarkable differences in the images where refugees are seen on water and on the land. Long streams of refugee movements are snapped inside Bangladesh –where the women were seen heading towards some refugee camps or shanties walking through the paddy fields with their meager belongings packed into plastic sacks in a desperate quest to find drier shelters, young children on lap treading on muddy walkways leaving behind the burning houses (Image 3)<sup>4</sup>.



Image 3

Their misery has been compounded by strong monsoon rains which have flooded their flimsy shelters made only out of bamboo and plastic sheets. In addition to be represented as one of the most ravaged and wretched people on earth, these images describe not only the mass and their plight, but also survival, struggle and urge for living in a safe place.

These images draw to their plight, but more importantly to the fact that they are already inside Bangladesh and struggling for shelter and life. Hence, their wretched bodies, scarred images not only called for careless gaze but responsible actions for the witnesses.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/13/world/asia/myanmar-rohingya-muslim.html> Credit: Adam Dean for The New York Times..



## 2.2 Death

Compared to sufferings, death was not a regular content of the circulated images. This is partly because most of the killings and massacres took place inside the Myanmar territory where the survivor family members had to run off and taking photographs was almost impossible. Horrifying experience of the survivors is circulated in recorded forms. However, a few images of death that had been circulated, appear to be specifically powerful with strong messages to notify the intensity of the Rohingya plight caused by indifference of others- civilians, state and international community.



Image 4

Perhaps Image 4 taken by AP is the most-circulate image of death since October in all media including social media, facebook, online news media and published journals. This snap emerged of a Rohingya Muslim mother desperately clutching her dead baby after the boat they were travelling to escape from Myanmar capsized as the family was fleeing to Bangladesh.

However, images 5 contain the same illustration of a child floating in water, also has similar resemblances with to Aylan Kurdi's image, at the same time there are certain other distinctiveness too. This image taken in September, 2017 sparked instant strong civil reaction in Bangladesh and abroad. The image of a 6/7 years-old girl, a little older than Aylan, floating in water, with her eyes closed and no grimace of pain in her face as if she is sleeping in water, was shocking and loving, and her slightly open mouth which is a common feature for sleeping kids made her adorable too. This image asked each spectator to look at it and reckon possible actions to stop more deaths.



Image 5

In almost all civil processions and protests against the Rohingya Crisis in Bangladesh, this image has been repeatedly produced and reproduced. In first two weeks of September, Facebook was flooded with this image with hundreds of shares and ‘sad’ emojis. Almost all protest-arranging organizations holding entirely different ideologies, used this image in their banners and posters.

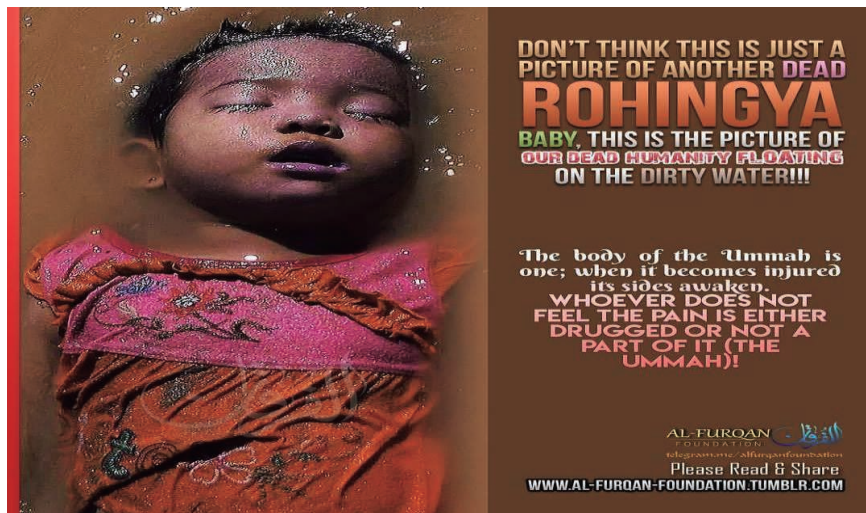


Image 6

It will not be an exaggeration to state that this photo—with its distinct and powerful appeal has been used in raising awareness and trigger off emotional response from all corners of the society. The first poster (Image 5) has been used and posted on the Facebook by a ‘progressive’ ‘left’ liberal secular organization in Bangladesh; whereas the second poster (Image 6) makes plea by a UK based faith organization to Muslim community (Ummah) of the world. Targeting different audience and conveying similar message,

Nevertheless, images of women and children purport strong testimony of plight as well as connote strong emotional relevance for the witnesses. Having a careful look at the popular images, some specific drifts could be identified. Hundreds of other images of death and violence are available both online and other media illustrating the range and magnitude of brutality experienced by the Rohingyas. However, such photographs of deformed and burnt corpses, lacerated wounds of the survivors have not turned out to be as appealing (to be shared) as the certain images were. Psychoanalysts might have the best answers to explain why the trend was so. But we can assume that the widely circulated emblematic images of violence, with its very content and frames wrench the spectator's heart with certain emotional motivation. In this regard, women and children are much appealing and also soothing for the eyes compared to the burnt or lacerated corpses. So, while poised imagery of women and dead children, pull out emotions of the witnesses, also soothe the gaze of the spectator as well. As such these images could be produced and reproduced and shared, making fewer ordeals for gaze while creating profound impact on mind. What else do the photographs convey? As Sontag argues, photographs of the suffering and martyrdom of a people are more than reminders of death, of failure, of victimization, rather they invoke the miracle of survival. And the photographs also aim at the perpetuation of memories means, inevitably, that one has undertaken the task of continually renewing, of creating, memories—aided, above all, by the impress of iconic photographs. People want to be able to visit—and refresh—their memories. And this is how connectivity and belongingness are created through images that open spaces for actions too.

### **2.3 Commonalities and Belonging: Representation and Action**

Collective memory is a strong determinant of sharing sufferings as Kleinman argues that social suffering is only communicated through collective memory. In this section, I will try to explore how collective memories have been operative in mobilizing emotions and responsibilities for the Rohingyas through posing similarities of events.

The latest arrivals of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh create an unprecedented strain on already overpopulated country with limited resources. Huge responses came from ordinary citizens of Bangladesh. Local families, even those with very little, donated what they could. People posted online bank account details asking others for charity. Local mosques organized donations and relief programs. Almost all political and social organizations raised their voice against persecution and organized relief program.

It was also reported that on the Muslim holiday of Eid-ul-Azha they had shared their sacrificial animal with the refugees. While the state of Bangladesh was to monitor the seemingly endless stream of Rohingya refugees crossing the border from Myanmar, many Bangladeshis felt that helping the Rohingya is what they owe to the memory of 1971.

In late March 1971, Bangladesh, the former East Pakistan, declared independence from West Pakistan and became independent after a bloody war in 1971. During the nine-month-long war, the Pakistani military and supporting political groups killed up to 3,000,000 people and raped between 200,000 and 400,000 Bangladeshi women in a systematic campaign of genocide.



Image 7

During the ensuing violence and repression, around 10 million of Bangladesh fled to India and stayed over there for throughout the nine-month period. In recent influx of Rohingyas, often the reference is made to Bangladesh's war for independence in 1971, when millions became refugees in India. Since September 2017, a number of Facebook users posted images (for example, Image 10) of 1971 in juxtaposition with recent frames that represent conspicuous resemblance to the stream of Rohingyas.

Images of the streams that visualize two different times -1971 and 2017, two communities – Rohingya and the Bengalis, were often juxtaposed with the recall of collective memory of Bangladeshi people. The images of two different contexts appear to be spectacularly similar- people walking down the muddy roads, wretched, ravaged –moving with their sacks and families. Many Bangladeshi facebook users argued that the scenes resonated most with 1971. Captions with the images contain messages like 'This is 1971 all over again', 'We had been through the similar experience and we have a moral obligation' 'we were refugees too' and so on.



However, it is not to say that all voices were equally supportive of the Rohingya plight. Some visual images attempted to show that the images were fabricated while the Rohingya themselves were setting fire and reports of atrocities are fake. Nevertheless, such allegations did not create any impact in home and abroad as these were echoing the Myanmar government. There exists a nominal but persistent concern on the alleged connectivity of the Rohingyas with drug dealing, preaching militancy and other crimes. A section of facebook citizens also tried to draw attention to the fact that Bangladesh is already an over-populated country –the 1 million Rohingya refugees would add some extra burden to this already overpopulated country. However, all these oppositional voices were somehow flooded out with the torrent of mainstream public compassion. Finally, empathy and support for the Rohingya, created scope to endorse connection with global community- and it should not be an exaggeration to state that photographs of women have contributed much to the raising empathy all over. And the major media houses stepped in, UN, NGOS and voluntary organizations moved and more importantly, public responses organized and much later Bangladesh government officially responded.

### **3.0 Rohingya Women in the Camp: Daily life and Struggle**

So what happened to the women after reaching Bangladesh?- The answer is blowing in the wind.

Back home in Myanmar, Islamic ideologies used to be the main sources of framing women's roles and responsibilities in the society. The Rohingya women traditionally stay indoors and do the household chores of the homes. Nevertheless, they become the worst victims of the atrocities of the military, who not only raped and evicted women from their homes, but killed men, women and children indiscriminately. Their tragedy even worsened when they started fleeing to Bangladesh with or without their family. After their horrific and exhaustive journey to Bangladesh, they found themselves to be stateless citizens, deprived of many basic human rights and services. Different studies reveal that low income status of their families, losing breadwinner male members and without having citizenship, put them in horrible condition where they started living in inhuman living conditions, compromise their social and religious values to start work for the family, became victims of polygamy, forced marriage, trafficking, sexual and gender based violence, with deteriorated general and reproductive health.

### 3.1 Poverty and Food Insecurity

A number of studies and reports demonstrate that most of the refugee families are of low income status and have little access to assets. Many families either lost their bread-winning male members or have been abandoned by the males who moved on to other place (inside or outside Bangladesh) for income or earning. As women, lacking any previous experience of income, it was not easy to earn in a foreign land, especially without a citizenship identity. This makes the families, especially the women more vulnerable, and drives them to be involved in forced marriage, and other forms of marriage deals. Rohingya women are then hired for jobs where they are low paid for their hard works. In worst cases, they become victim of illegal trafficking, drug dealing, prostitution and sometimes become part of the organized crimes.

A study reveals that refugee-inhabited parts of the Cox's Bazaar district constitutes one of the poverty-ridden regions in Bangladesh, where food insecurity is a general problem which also affects nutritional status of women in family and makes them vulnerable in power relationships (WFP-UNHCR, 2012).<sup>5</sup> This has great relevance for making women and children vulnerable to gender-based violence.

### 3.2 Social Life

As the majority of the Rohingya people are strong believers of Islam, women, even the young girls always wear a Burqa (a veil), when they go outside home. For instance, if they go out to bring water from the nearby tube-well they ensure that they are wearing their burqa before going out to collect water. Now days, when women are coming out of the home seeking job, going to the market, collecting ration, they are seen to wear burqas, or at least covering their heads with *Hijab*.

Marital relations are embedded in power relations and hence the women in patriarchal systems in general, and Rohingya women in particular, enter such relations with a disadvantageous position, subjected to the gendered stereotyping of their roles in the family and their dependent relationship with the male that in turn is driven by unequal laws of inheritance and asset transfer ensconced in religious

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<sup>5</sup>Neelsen, Nicolai Steen et. al 2012. The Contribution of Food Assistance to Durable Solutions in protracted Refugee Situations: its impact and role in Bangladesh, WFP and UNHCR



strictures. Such oppressive structures make women lacking the protection of a male guardian (father, husband, son), more susceptible to violence than others in the community.

For their inhuman living conditions in the camps, sustaining poverty and absence of citizenship of any country, Myanmar or Bangladesh, both men and women, take marriage as a strategy to survive. It is a common practice for many married Rohingya men, who had come to Bangladesh without their families and remarried shortly thereafter. Sometimes they even got married to poor Bangladeshi women to obtain a National Identity Card or some money for business. On the other hand, missing any income-earner of the family or lacking a proper guardian, Rohingya women could be lured easily into marriage as second wife by either Bangladeshi or Rohingya men. As life inside the camp is impoverished and insecure, many families consider early marriage to be a strategy of ensuring safety for their young daughters. In order to avoid the potential risks of sexual assault or rape, many young girls are married to elderly married men. Therefore, polygamy is also found to be prevalent among the Rohingya refugees, as Islamic marriage, permits men to have up to four wives, which may not require much paper works except oral commitments on the basis of holy words. Therefore, some solvent or powerful men had several marriages in order to engage their wives in economic activities, or at least creating more scope for collecting ration that will enhance his financial solvency. On the other hand, a number of women are found, who have been deserted shortly after the marriage or abandoned as the husband had migrated to a foreign country where they became imprisoned or faced execution, which results in their second marriage as mode of survival. Often the marriages occur in the forms of transaction, Rohingya families are lured to marry their daughters to marry Bangladeshi men at the exchange of ration, housing or some other facilities. Practically, promises are rarely kept. As marriages lack proper paper works, and also because of the fact that they lack citizenship, women cannot claim their marriage rights to the courts.

### **3.3 Sexual and Gender based Violence**

Issues of gender-based violence cannot be understood only as forms of relationship between individual man and woman, instead it has to be comprehended with regards to the greater social context. Violence against women is more deeply embedded in the social and political contexts, and therefore, the practices of violence and/or normalizing oppressive roles are endorsed by the patriarchal values of a given society. As such, it is also important to understand that violence can take many forms, physical

and nonphysical, social as well as psychological, even through consent, as violence could be made acceptable by social customs and norms, practices, legal and religious codes and beliefs, which may often be sustained and supported by the structure.

By and large, the Rohingyas came from a male-dominant social structure, where women's subordinate roles are sanctioned by social norms and religious values. As such, polygamy, early marriage and/or forced marriage, wife battering had been accepted as normal practices. After their exodus to Bangladesh, the notion of acceptance even extended up to abduction of young girls, verbal harassment, sexual assaults, transactional sex and so on. People in the camps rarely complain about these issues except these turn to rape or murder. It is also important to take into consideration that domestic violence is not a criminal offence even in Bangladesh, as patriarchal values prevail all over. As such, while most of the Bangladeshi women do not place official complaints against domestic violence, the Rohingya women, who lack the right as citizens, dare to think of complaining. Sometimes, cases are resolved in local arbitration involving community leaders, who are without any exception, males.

### **3.4 Health**

In traditional patriarchal societies, women's health is often a negligible concern. The case of Rohingya women is no exception, it is even worse. Because of sustained poverty, and their inherent tendency to feed the family first, women usually suffer from dearth of food. Malnutrition is common as after feeding their family, they rarely have enough for their own. Often the women are to starve, which affects their health, especially during pregnancy.

The environmental condition of the densely-populated camps lacking proper sanitation and water supply impacts women's health in many ways. As there are inadequate sanitation facilities, people are to wait in long queues, while women have to wait even more. In most of the camps, men get privilege, while women wait for long and finish early as men are always in a hurry. Therefore, women prefer to go in the dawn, even before the sunrise, or in the late nights when the pressure of the camp resident is lower, but their privacy and security are always at stake at that time. Such day-long waiting for urination or defecation impacts their health, and many women reported to have suffered from complications.

In the camps, it is the women who are responsible for fetching water. This basic task is quite tedious as the tube wells are sometimes distant from their houses, and often they are to fetch water several times a day.

Nevertheless, when women are deprived of basic health facilities, reproductive health gets even lesser attention. In addition to the lack of knowledge on menstrual hygiene, dearth of items and private places for disposal affect the young girls most. Among the Rohingyas, adopting family-planning methods were not so common. After coming to Bangladesh where many got married quickly, child-birth also increased significantly. Inside the camps, women give birth without any support of trained doctors or nurses, sometimes they receive support from birth-attendants. In the big camps like camp in Kutupalong, some organizations offer limited services by trained birth-attendants, while other camps have no such services. Furthermore, either because of their early marriage or being rape victim, many young girls gave birth to children, who are extremely malnourished as well as deprived of all sorts of reproductive health care, which do/will affect their own as well as their child's health.

In addition to the above mentioned issues of economic deprivation, structural violence and deteriorating health, concerns for security, inadequate facilities for child care, risks of getting involved (intentionally or unintentionally) in drug dealing and other crimes made Rohingya women's position even more vulnerable.

At this moment, a number of national and international organizations have been operating in Cox's Bazar, Teknaf, Ukhiya and adjacent areas, addressing many issues. In fact, women and their issues have been receiving primary attention from the donors, NGOs and other organizations. Although lot more efforts need to be put to address women issues, slow but steady changes are also visible in the camps. Nevertheless, women are the major vehicles of these changes. Being widow or abandoned by husband, they are taking entry to the job market as the mothers they are to take the responsibility of their children. Lacking proper skill, training and education, they are extremely over-exploited and low-paid. Still their entry as a bulk of labor force will make significant impacts which are to be addressed in future. Economic needs of the family could not restrict them inside the households, rather by receiving trainings and participating in different programs, women have become primary agents of the forthcoming transformations of the social dynamics among the Rohingyas. Interesting enough, these everyday sufferings, their daily struggles and revival of energy have never received attention in the social media. Compared to the way women and their pains, were portrayed and widely circulated in social media, their agency has rarely been recognized. In order to investigate the reasons for

disappearance of Rohingya women from the social media, answers might be sought in the complexity of nationality, victimhood and also the rules that underline what images are to be made with what purposes targeting which audience, and why women are major contents of certain images.

#### **4.0 What Can and Cannot be Seen**

Both Azoulay and Sontag argue that because of the failure of other media, images create stark and striking appeal that other media could not. At the beginning of Rohingya influx, there was censorship from the Bangladesh state as the government denied the entry of the Rohingyas. Instead, the state-regulated newspapers and television channels tried to establish the fact Border Guards of Bangladesh had been pushing the Rohingyas back to Myanmar as they did before. By and large, national and local media remained more or less silent about the Rohingya plight that sustained for first two weeks. In this period, only the images and videos by the local people and international media have been circulated and re-circulated in order to draw attention to the atrocities and brutalities faced by the Rohingyas. The circulations of images were so widespread in reaching a vast audience and strong in conveying messages that at some point both visibility and production reversed. Because of these immense production and circulation, there was little room left for ignoring or denying the fact, especially when the major media houses stepped in, UN, NGOS and voluntary organizations moved and more importantly, public responses organized and much later Bangladesh government officially responded.

Many actors and subjects became engaged in this in this entire endeavor- the victims, the image producers, circulators/sharers, relief-organizers, and thus making the making and sharing images a compound project. However, while many issues received extreme attention, some other issues were never looked at or investigated through the images. The role of Bangladesh government, especially how they pushed back many Rohingyas in the beginning have never been photographed. In a similar vein, government of Myanmar was not as much targeted as Suu Kyi was. Instead, Myanmar leader and Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi has been criticized internationally for her lackluster response to the Rohingya refugee crisis, with some even calling for her to be stripped of her award. Hundreds of cartoons of Suu Kyi have been posted on facebook identifying her as monster. In fact, Suu Kyi is an enemy who can be easily targeted because of her public celebrity image.

Favorable conditions also allowed to the production and dissemination of particular images of plight. Cox's Bazar, the southernmost district of Bangladesh bordering Myanmar, is the most adored tourist

spot for its longest beach. Every here and there visitors are roaming around with their camera and phones. Entry points of the Rohingya refugees were located in different border areas of this district and shores, though far from the main tourist spots. However, once the tourists and others came to know the Rohingya influx, people, mostly visitors moved to those places. Surprisingly, unlike many other borders, Bangladeshi citizens did not face any restriction of movement to visit the border areas where the Rohingya shelters and camps are located. On the other hand, Bangladesh government and state agencies have tried to control images and information depicting or indicating violence at all times. Surprisingly, such strong government surveillance by Bangladesh government that has been monitoring people's movements and statements on social media has never found to be functional in Rohingya crisis.

Images play a role in all realms of politics, their significance and impact are far more obvious if they depict violence. Pictures of unrest, riots and violence travel easily and render it difficult to ignore 'the pain of others' (Sontag 2003). In the case of Rohingya crisis, through the circulation of iconic images of violence, plight and suffering a responsible witnessing was created and that also resulted in creating a space of social action. Following Leshu Torchin, it can be argued that this witnessing is a dynamic field of cultural-historical production and engagement, and witnessing publics are created and mobilized through visual technologies typically associated with mass media and popular culture. Instead of dismissing the popular culture as trivializing and commodifying phenomenon, Torchin argues that popular culture can "serve as an active site for engagement, political debate, and the practice of citizenship" (2012: 13). In this way, witnessing, as it happened in citizens' response to Rohingya issue, becomes an ethical and transformative process and of a great political value. This response could be read as 'countervisuality', while dominant modes of visual representations failed or was reluctant to represent the extent of violence.

However, there still remains question to what extent such civil (Azoulay 2012) actions could challenge the structure. Apparently, massive response to Rohingya crisis, instead of questioning the structure of violence, was mainly aimed at mobilizing support, relief and targeting safe enemies. As soon as the Rohingya women entered Bangladesh, they got engaged in the daily struggle, which are not very different from any Bangladeshi women, although the intensity and magnitude may vary. Therefore, their struggles and experience failed to appeal the prevalent patriarchal structures and its overwhelming ideological presence in social media. In fact, this image-motivated activism may always have the tendency to ignore the underlying structure of violence and to response only towards

symptoms. Kleinman (1997) asks us to consider the implications of representations of violence that dehistoricize and depoliticize suffering, whether through now common- place media images of the unimaginable (to us) suffering of others or by the enumeration of suffering in development statistics. In representations of this sort, violence as a technique is condemned but the principles on which violence is being perpetuated-the structural wellsprings of that violence-are left untouched.

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